

# State Representative Matt Pierce

District 61



## Early Learning Initiative Designed to Boost Student Achievement

I support Gov. Joe Kernan's efforts to enact an Early Learning Initiative that would help provide voluntary full-day kindergarten for all children across the state. House Bill 1234 outlined a plan to provide access to voluntary full-day kindergarten to an additional 20,000 children by this fall and to every Hoosier child by 2007.

HB 1234 passed the House of Representatives on January 29 with bipartisan support. In February, the Senate amended the bill so it would only require a summer study of the issue. As of this writing, I am working with other House members to convince the Senate to enact full-day kindergarten now.

Experts agree that early education is a sound, necessary investment in our future. As Gov. Kernan said when introducing this plan during his State of the State speech on January 13, "Every dollar that is invested in high-quality, comprehensive early learning initiatives helps us save \$7 in welfare, special education and criminal justice costs."

There are many benefits to the programming provided through the Early Learning Initiative. We will be supporting parents as a child's first and most important teacher. We will increase parental and family involvement in teaching and encouraging reading. We will give all children access to high quality programs that will enable them to enter school ready and able to succeed for the future.

Few people dispute the benefits of full-day kindergarten and early learning. However, the Senate seems to be saying we can't afford to help Hoosier children now. Gov. Kernan has identified ways to pay for full-day kindergarten with money the state already has. The General Assembly has two choices before it—it can either throw its hands up in the air and decide we can make no progress in education until better economic times or it can find creative ways to invest in education that will bring the state great dividends in the future. I support enacting full-day kindergarten now because each year of delay is another year when Indiana's children miss the opportunity to get a better education.



**Please visit my website, [www.in.gov/H61](http://www.in.gov/H61), to learn more about legislation considered by the General Assembly.**

# Higher Education:

## *Funding Issues Loom on the Horizon*

Senator Luke Kenley stirred debate over rising college tuition costs when he introduced Senate Bill 262 that would have limited tuition increases for students already enrolled at state universities and Ivy Tech to four percent or an inflation rate set by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. The bill would also have required tuition rates to be set before December 1 of each year.

SB 262 passed out of the Senate Committee on Education and Career Development, was amended by the full Senate, but was not called for a final vote by Senator Kenley after several state universities pledged to provide greater public input during the tuition setting process.

While I share Senator Kenley's concern about the increasing burden on students and families struggling to fund a college education, the debate over tuition seemed to avoid the real issue that most directly affects tuition rates—the level of state support for higher education. Inadequate state funding and a tuition limit would put universities in a budget squeeze that would likely lead to a lower quality education for students.

I supported efforts in the 2003 budget session that restored cuts made to higher education and provided modest budget increases for state universities and Ivy Tech. This was a major accomplishment during difficult economic times and declining state revenues.

A new two-year budget will have to be adopted during next year's legislative session. I am concerned that without a major improvement in the economy the state will not have enough revenue to fund public schools, higher education and essential state services. I will continue urging members of the General Assembly to properly fund our universities and Ivy Tech because higher education is the key to economic opportunity and advancement of our state.



Stay in touch with

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